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INQUIRY REPORTED INTO CONTRA ARMS

Federal Officials Said to Look at Reports of Gun-Running and Traffic in Cocaine

WASHINGTON, April 10 (AP) — A Federal investigation is under way into assertions that Nicaraguan rebels and some of their non-governmental American backers have engaged in gun-running and drug trafficking, according to United States officials and sources close to the inquiry.

The investigation, by the Federal Bureau of Investigation working with other federal agencies, has been conducted in at least seven states and Central America, according to the sources.

Twelve American, Nicaraguan and Cuban-American backers of the rebels who were interviewed by The Associated Press said they had been questioned by the F.B.I. in recent months. The questioning, sometimes over several days, was conducted in Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Texas, Colorado and California, the backers of the contras said.

Arms Shipments Examined

Leon Kellner, the United States Attorney for Southern Florida, is directing the investigation, which focuses on possibly illegal shipments of arms from New Orleans and southern Florida to rebels based in Honduras and Costa Rica, according to Federal authorities and several backers of the rebels who have been questioned.

The sources said the inquiry also is examining assertions that cocaine was smuggled to help finance the rebels' war effort, and that the Neutrality Act was violated, the sources said. The Neutrality Act makes it a crime to initiate or organize, on American soil, military attacks against a country with which the United States is not at war.

The investigation is being conducted as President Reagan lobbies for \$100 million in aid to the rebels, including a renewal of military aid. The House is to vote on the issue next week.

F.B.I. Interviews Described

Jack Terrell, who was a leader of the American paramilitary group Civilian-Military Assistance, said F.B.I. agents and prosecutors from the United States Attorney's office in Miami had met with him several times.

He said the investigators had asked him about what are said to have been weapons shipments from the United States to contra base camps in Central America, involvement of contras in drug smuggling, and a reported conspiracy to assassinate the United States Ambassador to Costa Rica, Lewis A. Tambs.

Federal investigators confirmed that they had interviewed Mr. Terrell and others in connection with the inquiry, but they refused to discuss details. An F.B.I. spokesman, Bill Carter, said the bureau does not comment on pending investigations until there are arrests or indictments.

F.B.I. inquiries into the possibilities of Neutrality Act violations and illegal exports of arms in connection with the contras were conducted as early as October 1984, but no charges have been brought. Sources said some aspects of the previous investigations have been reopened.

In one previous investigation, a White House official in charge of the contra program, Lieut. Col. Oliver North, was questioned several times last year by Justice Department officials about possible violations of the law by the contras, according to two sources close to Colonel North.

Colonel North is a deputy director for political-military affairs on the National Security Council and a principal adviser to President Reagan on Central America. He has overseen the contra program since 1984, when Congress stopped C.I.A. aid to the rebels.

The White House had no immediate

comment on the current investigation. A White House spokesman, Edward P. Djerejian, declined to respond to six inquiries from The Associated Press over two days.

Reports of Arms Shipment

In the current inquiry, federal investigators have asked about reports of an arms shipment in March 1985 from the Fort Lauderdale, Fla., airport to rebels based in Costa Rica, on a charter flight through a Salvadoran air force base, the backers of the contras said.

Four supporters of the rebels told A.P. that they helped collect weapons from two Miami homes and took the shipment to Fort Lauderdale for the flight. One supporter of the contras, Steven Carr, said he then accompanied the supplies on the charter flight to El Salvador, where the weapons were

stored before being shipped to a rebel base camp in northern Costa Rica.

Mr. Carr and four others were arrested more than a year ago by Costa Rican officials. They remain in prison on charges that their activities supporting the rebels violated Costa Rican neutrality.

After the deaths of two Americans who were shot down in a helicopter inside northern Nicaragua in September 1984, the F.B.I. investigated reports that United States military supplies, including weapons, had been diverted to the rebels from two Alabama National Guard armories, in Huntsville and Decatur, but no charges were brought.

The Americans belonged to Civilian-Military Assistance, a paramilitary organization based in Decatur, Ala., that has trained and fought alongside the contras.